

CITY OF COLUMBUS

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONSE TO EMPLOYEE DEATH

Guidelines Statement

The death of an employee, whether resulting from a prolonged illness or sudden, unexpected means, is a traumatic event that will greatly impact the workplace. The extent of reactions will vary and will be, in part, dependent on:

- How long the employee was a member of the workgroup;
- Popularity of the employee;
- Current issues that are occurring in the workplace;
- Circumstances of the employee's death (expected or unexpected).

Recognizing and understanding typical reactions and using the guidelines below will help employees manage grief, begin the recovery and healing process and reduce negative effects on the workplace.

Typical Reactions & Effect on the Workplace

Some effects commonly found among a workforce following the death of an employee include:

- Grief reactions including sadness, anger and/or remorse;
- Excessive emotion; i.e. tears and anger;
- Preoccupation with the person who died or the circumstances surrounding their death (coworkers will talk and think a lot about the person and associated events, especially in the first few days);
- Difficulty focusing and/or staying on task with work assignments;
- Avoiding the deceased employee's workspace or wanting to be in their workspace (usually one of two extremes);
- May place blame (on work environment, management, coworkers).

Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Services

Always contact EAP when learning of an employee's death. Using EAP services will help the workforce in coping with the employee's death and aid in the healing process. EAP will:

- Provide advice on how best to handle the situation including developing a plan appropriate for that workgroup;
- EAP staff will provide on-site crisis management and/or debriefing services when needed.

To consult with EAP staff:

- Call 645-6894 and request to speak with an EAP staff member.

- If you reach the EAP voicemail or if calling after normal business hours, leave a message, then hit the “8” key to activate the EAP emergency pager. An EAP staff person always carries this pager, so messages will be answered promptly.

Coworker Notification & Support

Human Resource managers and supervisors must notify coworkers in a considerate manner. This will be dependent on the workgroup and employees. If unsure of the best approach, consult with EAP staff.

If the event has already been publicized in the news media, meet immediately with employees upon their arrival to work, even if they were previously called at home. Be aware that there may be individuals who are not already aware of the death. Be sensitive to the emotional needs of employees and reach out to particular staff members when their actions indicate they need additional support. Some points to consider during the period immediately after the death of an employee:

- Who in the organization the employee was close to, including coworkers, smoking group members if employee was a smoker and/or other groups that the employee was involved with, either formal or informal in nature;
- Recognize and understand common reactions people have when someone they care about has died;
- Forward information about funeral or memorial service arrangements as quickly as possible after they are known;
- Offer to coordinate sending flower arrangements or collecting funds for suggested charities or select a coworker who was close to the deceased to coordinate arrangements (a group of people can also perform these tasks and support each other during the process);
- Be tolerant and patient about employees’ need to discuss the person and the circumstances surrounding their death;
- Refer employees who may require ongoing support to deal with their grief to EAP.

Be inclusive about making decisions regarding the employee’s workspace. Identify coworkers who were especially close to the employee and consult with them, as well as the employee’s family members, about what to do with personal belongings. Offer to include family members in the process of going through personal items, if they wish to do so.

It is never advisable to pack personal items from an employee’s office space immediately following their death. A better plan is to limit access to the space to selected individual(s) such as the immediate supervisor and/or close coworkers, if there is a need to retrieve work-related materials. Removing personal items should be done later.

After coworkers have an opportunity to reflect on their loss and begin to deal with their grief, suggest they develop ideas to honor the deceased employee’s memory. In some locations, creating a committee to address the issue may be helpful. A few examples:

- Holding special events in remembrance such as memorial services;

- Posting a poem or other special item on the employee's door;
- Planting a tree in their memory;
- Developing a scholarship fund or other charitable donation in their memory;
- Sending cards or letters of sympathy, support or to share special memories about the deceased employee with family members and friends;
- Hanging a picture or plaque in a special place at the worksite;
- Writing an article about the employee and their contributions to the workplace or the community for a departmental newsletter or other publication.

Family Member Assistance

The highest-ranking Human Resources Manager, supervisor or appropriate management representative should contact the family:

- Describe by telephone or in person (leave the decision to the family as to whether they prefer a personal visit) the process required to receive the employee's final wages;
- Provide a list of contacts to guide the family through the paperwork process. This information should be organized and presented in an orderly fashion, with as many specifics as possible. This will be a period of great confusion and turmoil for the family. Provide a written reference including names, phone numbers and purpose of contact's involvement (sample attached);
- Provide an EAP pamphlet and encourage them to call. At the request of the family, EAP will contact them directly, but they must request this service first.
- Do not assume to already know what the family needs during this time. Offer assistance and ask for their input on how to assist the family members as they cope with their loss. Include coworkers in the decision-making process once appropriate actions have been identified.

Specific Steps Concerning the Employee's Financial Accounts

1. Call the Treasurer's Office, 645-8190. Any checks in process for the employee will be pulled and not released until official notification, acceptable to the City Treasurer, is received. Acceptable documentation may include a power-of-attorney from the estate executor, a court order or other proof of beneficiary rights. See Page 6 for additional information.
2. Pull the beneficiary notification from the employee's personnel file and contact Central Payroll, 645-7196 (see Page 6 for additional information). Verify the form on file at Central Payroll has the same beneficiary as the form at the agency Human Resources Office. Central Payroll will ask for verification of beneficiary's mailing address (if not verified, a letter and benefit form will automatically be sent to employee's most recent address on file), last date worked and date of death.
3. Family medical benefits will be effective only until the end of the month in which the employee died. Ensure appropriate COBRA or other benefit forms are delivered to the immediate family as quickly as possible.

4. Perform a benefit audit by verifying if supplemental insurance benefits or credit union accounts exist for the deceased employee by checking the PI-PAY inquiry screen. Provide the family with appropriate contact person information. A sample contact listing is attached. It is not recommended that account numbers be given to family members. The beneficiary or estate executor(s) should be able to obtain that information.
5. Employee's last check is to include payment through the close of business on the date of death (see Page 6 for additional information).

CITY OF COLUMBUS
Human Resource & Employee Benefit Contact Listing

<u>Contact</u>	<u>Telephone</u>	<u>Website</u>
Department Human Resources Office <i>Insert Contact Name & Number</i>		
Counseling & Support		
Employee Assistance Program	614.645.6894	www.cmhhealth.org
Term Life Insurance		
C.N.A.	800.262.2255	www.cna.com
Insurance Beneficiary Verification		
City of Columbus, Central Payroll Tim Carroll, Bonnie Buck	614.645.7196	
Final Paycheck		
City of Columbus, Treasurer's Office Shirley Todd	614.645.8190	www.columbustreasurer.com
Credit Union		
CME Federal Credit Union	614.224.8890	www.cmefcu.org
Retirement Benefits		
Ohio PERS	800.222.7377	www.opers.org
Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund	800.860.9599 or 614.228.2975	www.op-f.org
Deferred Compensation		
Ohio Public Employees Program	877.644.6457	www.ohio457.org
Medical Insurance		
United Health Care (Medical/Rx)	800.681.3849	www.uhc.com
Anthem (Dental)	800.949.4447 or 614.846.8417	www80.anthem.com
Supplemental Insurances		
Colonial Life & Accident Insurance	800.325.4368	www.cna.com
AFLAC	800.323-5391 or 614.761.1342	www.aflac.com

**City of Columbus
Central Payroll Office
Insurance Beneficiary HELP Sheet**

Term Life Insurance

To make a claim for the City of Columbus Term Life Insurance Benefit, complete the enclosed C.N.A. form. Instructions are included on the C.N.A. claim form and on the letter from the Central Payroll office. Upon approval of a claim, C.N.A. will deposit the benefit to a newly created interest bearing account. An information package with a supply of checks is forwarded by C.N.A. to the beneficiary.

Final Paycheck

In accordance with State law, if a paycheck does not exceed earnings of \$2,500.00, the City of Columbus can generally release the paycheck of a deceased employee to (1) the surviving spouse, (2) any one or more of the children 18 years of age or older, or (3) the father or mother of the deceased employee. If the earnings exceed \$2,500.00, proof of estate executorship(s) or estate appointment is generally required. Contact the Probate Court of the respective county in which the deceased resided. For the Franklin County Probate Court, contact 462-3843.

Pension Funds

All part-time and full-time City of Columbus employees contribute into one of two statewide retirement systems. For Police or Fire employees, contact the Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund. For all other employees, contact the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System.

Optional Deductions

City of Columbus employees have the option of participating in a supplemental retirement plan and/or purchasing additional insurance through any of the following:

Ohio Deferred Compensation Plan
Colonial Life & Accident Insurance
AFLAC

City of Columbus employees also have optional membership with the Columbus Municipal Employees (CME) Federal Credit Union.